CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE FIVE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-THIRD PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 20 February 1991, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Carl-Magnus Hyltenius (Sweden)

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The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 583rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset I wish to give a warm welcome, on behalf of the Conference, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary, His Excellency Dr. Géza Jeszenszky, who on the occasion of his visit to Geneva expressed the wish to address us. As is known, the Minister assumed his high office after devoting his professional activities to the academic field, where he played an outstanding role in his country. I am sure that members will follow his statement with particular interest, and I wish to thank him for joining us today.

As this is the first plenary meeting of the Swedish presidency of the Conference, I should now like to make an opening statement.

It is an honour for Sweden to assume the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference has a great responsibility and a vital function, not least today when recent developments have underlined the need to find global solutions to a number of pressing political issues. Some of these are on our agenda, and it is our responsibility to deal with them in an effective manner. The history of disarmament negotiations is full of disappointments, but it also shows that important agreements can be negotiated in this framework. In fact, the global multilateral disarmament machinery has produced some important treaties, and at least one major new convention is now within reach.

It is encouraging that many States participate in our work even if they are not members of the Conference on Disarmament. In today's world, global and multilaterally negotiated solutions are become even more necessary than before.

There are reasons to believe that this Conference will gradually move towards a greater degree of mutual understanding between delegations and groups of delegations. Such a trend is already noticeable in the context of the United Nations General Assembly. For example, the proportion of resolutions adopted without a vote in the First Committee has been rising the last few years. It has also been possible for the United Nations Disarmament Commission to conclude some of its long-standing issues with consensus reports. It is to be hoped that the vanishing effects of earlier East-West confrontation will not be replaced by a North-South axis of tension that might be equally paralysing for work in the field of disarmament. We can all contribute to avoiding that danger, but it requires an effort by all parties to take the legitimate interests of others into account. We are indeed faced with an opportunity that must not be missed.

It is with great satisfaction that I recall that despite certain difficulties, it has already been possible to re-establish no less than five ad hoc committees, which can now start working. I should like to pay tribute to my predecessor as President of the Conference,

(The President)

Ambassador Rasaputram of Sri Lanka, for his achievement and for his authoritative and skilled stewardship. I shall certainly spare no effort to discharge my responsibilities in the best possible manner, but whether substantive progress will be made or not is, of course, dependent on all participants in this important endeavour.

The greatest threat that faces mankind is the danger of nuclear war. It is therefore proper that the nuclear issues are at the top of the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. It is a source of satisfaction that the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban was re-established last year. It has now been established again, and it is my hope that it will very soon get down to substantive work. Statements made in this Conference testify to the importance that many delegations attach to this issue.

As in previous years, it was not possible to reach agreement on the establishment of ad hoc committees on agenda items 2 and 3. However, arrangements have been made for a thorough discussion of these items, as demonstrated by the very comprehensive list of topics read out by the President at our last plenary meeting. I hope that all interested delegations will participate actively in the discussions, so as to prepare the ground for future solutions to the vital issues involved.

It is my view that the conclusion of the negotiations on a chemical weapons convention is within reach. The Ad Hoc Committee will resume its work today. The current conflict in the Middle East has once again illustrated the importance and urgency of these negotiations.

An increasing number of States will become active in the peaceful uses of outer space. Some of them may also contemplate military uses which may be considered threatening to other States. The CD has an opportunity of making a decisive contribution to the efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space before it becomes an established fact. There are several examples of similar agreements in the past, preventing undesirable developments, agreements which have proved to be extremely useful. The re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee provides this opportunity.

Negative security assurances have been the subject of consideration in the CD for many years. The Ad Hoc Committee just established can register a new development, since the United Nations General Assembly last autumn managed to agree on one single resolution on this issue. Radiological weapons will continue to be dealt with in an ad hoc committee. Hopefully the work of the Committee will make substantive progress this year in the two Contact Groups on tracks A and B. There is no agreement to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on the Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament. I therefore plan to appoint a Special Co-ordinator on this issue. The consideration of the question of the improved and effective functioning of the Conference will continue. Last year's consultations led to some concrete results, and I hope that further progress will be made.

(The President)

The problem of the expansion of the membership of the Conference, and the more recent issue of whether the number of members should be allowed to decrease, require in my view active consideration. It has been pending for a very long time. It is the first time in the history of this Conference and its predecessors that the question of expansion has been considered for such a long time without any decision being taken. As you recall, it was agreed as early as 1979 that the membership would be reviewed at regular intervals, and in 1982 a decision in principle was taken on the question of expansion. However, no progress has been noted, which has been reflected in the repeated unchanged wording of the relevant passage in the report to the General Assembly. Non-members have been waiting for many years for a decision. It is high time that the Conference moved from words to deeds in this matter, and I therefore intend to pursue it actively during my presidency.

That concludes my statement. I now have pleasure in giving the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary, His Excellency Dr. Géza Jeszenszky.

Mr. JESZENSZKY (Hungary): It is a great pleasure for me to address the Conference on Disarmament as the Foreign Minister of the first Hungarian Government since 1947 responsible to a freely and democratically elected Parliament. First of all, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your accession to the important post of President, and wish you every success in your highly responsible work. Let me also express my gratitude to the representatives of the States members of the Conference, and in particular Ambassador Rasaputram of Sri Lanka, the previous President, for their understanding and co-operation in making this special plenary meeting possible.

The Conference on Disarmament, this prestigious body, is an important forum for conducting negotiations on issues that are primordial for international peace and security. During the decades of existence of the Conference and its predecessors this manifold task has been met with great expertise, intensive work and valuable results.

The present modalities of the work of the Conference were elaborated more than a decade ago and have remained practically unchanged. The topics on the agenda are questions of real significance. During the 1980s, however, new challenges have also emerged, many of them having a direct bearing on international peace and security.

This session of the Conference on Disarmament is taking place when the international community is making grave efforts to restore the sovereignty of Kuwait, which has fallen victim to an inadmissible act of aggression. We firmly believe that the numerous Security Council resolutions calling for the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait reflect the principle of collective security enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

It is obvious that the Gulf conflict will have a major impact on the realities of global politics, and the unfolding new situation will differ in many ways from what it used to be before 2 August 1990. At the same time there are other factors that have already exerted their influence on the status of world affairs.

(Mr. Jeszenszky, Hungary)

In the wake of the revolutionary democratic changes in Europe, confrontation between East and West is falling into oblivion. This process was marked most recently by the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the signing of a treaty of historic importance, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

Hungary has always attached special importance to the ongoing arms control negotiations in Vienna. These negotiations faithfully reflected all the positive trends that have characterized our continent during the last two years. It was an encouraging phenomenon that apart from the biggest military Powers, which bear primary responsibility in maintaining security and stability in Europe, smaller States could also actively play a part in creating the final consensus.

I think it is needless to stress again that my country has a special interest in building a new co-operative security structure in Europe that would extinguish the division of the continent once and for all. We are of the firm belief that the tranquillity and stability of the "European house" is closely intertwined with the successful continuation of the CFE negotiations.

Last November, the Paris summit created the overall impression that the foundation of a new European security structure was established and a historic breakthrough had been achieved. In fact, the CFE Treaty is not just an ordinary agreement but the first multilateral treaty ever to stipulate significant reductions in conventional armed forces. We continue to believe that this treaty indeed holds the full potential for serving as a solid and accurately drafted basis for the realization of the principal objectives of conventional arms control in Europe. The key for the success of this endeavour lies in the full-scale implementation of its correlative provisions.

We consider it a basic test for the whole CSCE process that all States - without exception - should recognize their special responsibilities and spare no efforts in order to forestall any negative impacts on the realization of our shared original objectives. Let us hope that the very near future will prove that each and every State party to the CFE Treaty is ready to heed the appeals of others and, accordingly, is able to work in the same constructive spirit as that which we experienced at the very same forum previously.

There is another factor of change in world affairs, namely, the growing importance of multilateralism. The revitalization of the United Nations has been felt in recent years. The united stand of the international community in facing the events since last August has proved that the role of the world organization will be upgraded even more in the future. Thus, it is solely up to us to make full use of the existing vast possibilities.

In parallel with these positive trends, a regrettable phenomenon is gaining ground in multilateral affairs. There is a growing difference in approaches between North and South, a danger inherent in many of the issues of international security. While seeking solutions to pending problems care must be taken to avoid the emergence of new rifts and tensions, especially along the North-South axis, since this might undermine the very objective of those constructive efforts.

(Mr. Jeszenszky, Hungary)

Besides promising tendencies, signs of growing disharmony are showing between the performance of the Conference on Disarmament and the direction as well as the pace of events having a direct impact on international security. Even at this juncture, where the further course of developments remains unclear, it seems to be appropriate to launch an informal process of assessing the challenges and possible solutions in the context of multilateral disarmament.

The Conference was rightly designated more than a decade ago the multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament. This role itself, however, proved to a reason for heated, sometimes "theological" debates, when the expression "negotiating body" had to be filled with substance. We are convinced that it is of the utmost importance to preserve the primary function of the Conference of working out disarmament agreements through concrete and direct negotiations. Nevertheless, it must be realized that a strict and narrow interpretation of the negotiating function is illusory. It does not always reflect the political realities, and might only yield fruitless political wrangling.

With remarkable intensity the Conference on Disarmament is performing its task of elaborating a multilateral convention on the comprehensive and total prohibition of chemical weapons and the destruction of their stockpiles. The problem of chemical weapons is, of course, only one of several items on the agenda of the Conference. There are other items, many of them highly important, on which subsidiary bodies are now functioning but where no major breakthrough has been achieved over a prolonged period of time. On some other items, even getting down to substantial work has for years been impossible.

The "Decalogue" of the Conference was created to be a wide and flexible framework, covering practically all aspects of disarmament. The present agenda, built on the basis of this Decalogue, concentrates the efforts of the Conference on weapons of mass destruction. Given the enormous destructive power of such weaponry, no reasoning is needed to justify that special attention. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that the nuclear and chemical threats are not the only dangers facing mankind. The Decalogue provides us with a very useful umbrella, and it might be opportune to start thinking whether the present agenda could be developed through a gradual and realistic adjustment in order to face the realities of the world.

The Conference on Disarmament offers another rare opportunity through the fact that it is a forum where countries are represented both politically and geographically in a balanced manner. This unique balance provides a sound framework for dealing with global security and disarmament issues and can contribute to the reconciliation of differing approaches.

Speaking about the need to adapt to the requirements of a changing international environment, let me address some of the challenges we consider as being of overriding significance from the point of view of security and stability. For years nuclear issues dominated the disarmament agenda, often practically precluding the possibility of considering the issue of conventional weapons. Without denying the importance of nuclear disarmament, this approach, in my view, turned out to be misleading. It has often been argued that States with the largest arsenals have a special responsibility in

(Mr. Jeszenszky, Hungary)

pursuing the process of conventional disarmament. The first CFE agreement, when implemented, will have produced conventional force levels in Europe that will enhance stability by eliminating former imbalances and fundamentally reducing capabilities for launching a surprise attack or a large-scale offensive.

Attempts to bring about further reductions in conventional forces in Europe might be affected by the size of armed forces in the neighbouring regions. The Gulf crisis has shown dramatically that an excessive level of conventional armed forces cannot be considered as an internal problem of a given region. We are, of course, aware of the differences in security requirements that exist geographically. Yet it is also true that no region can be isolated from the overall security situation. We do not see why conventional disarmament could not be initiated in regions where massive arms accumulation no longer serves the sole purpose of legitimate self-defence but rather aggressive intent, as evidenced by the tragic invasion of Kuwait last summer.

Regional initiatives are the most promising in the field of conventional disarmament. Experience gained from the implementation of conventional disarmament and confidence-building measures, as well as measures of military openness in certain regions, might also be relevant in a wider context. Sharing information on conventional force levels and measures aimed at reducing them could well help promote the cause of conventional disarmament in different parts of the world. I believe that the Conference on Disarmament could provide a framework for such a wider exchange of relevant information.

In 1990, Hungary provided the participants of the Conference on Disarmament with detailed information on the structure and primary indicators of our military forces, and the significant reductions that have taken place in the Hungarian army, and we also presented a report on our military expenditure. We considered this step an example of our readiness to strengthen the transparency of military affairs and to take voluntary confidence-building measures. It is also evident that arms transfers can have serious implications for conventional disarmament in addition to the effects on stability. The lack of a mechanism to keep track of even legal transactions might provide ideal terrain for an aggressive arms build-up, contributing to the aggravation of the situation. Restraint on the side of suppliers and recipients alike can do a lot to alleviate the problem.

In fact, it was only recently that a seemingly routine arms deal carried out by a Hungarian foreign trading company had an unfortunate impact on bilateral relations with a neighbouring State. The unwelcome outcome of the transaction led to the realization that amidst circumstances of creating a free-market economy and liberalizing trade it is a special responsibility of the Government to step up control over the arms trade, however minor the share it might account for in our economic activities. We are convinced that greater openness and transparency in international conventional arms transfers would have a major role in confidence-building. Adequate national supervision of arms transactions also has a contribution to make. Hungary for its part is ready to co-operate on a bilateral, regional or multilateral level to seek ways and means to tackle the problem.

(Mr. Jeszenszky, Hungary)

Most of the security challenges the world has to face today have manifested themselves strikingly in the Gulf war. These include the menace resulting from nuclear and missile proliferation, the possible use of chemical and biological weapons and the introduction of the ecological weapon.

The issue of ballistic missile capabilities is gaining special relevance today and has implications that go beyond any given region. The deplorable endeavour to escalate the Gulf conflict clearly demonstrated that possession of such military hardware and technology coupled with irresponsible political behaviour could represent a major threat to international security and stability. Important measures have been taken to thwart missile proliferation. The Missile Technology Control Régime or relevant Soviet-American co-operation could be cited as examples. Yet the effectiveness of these steps is somewhat curtailed since they are far from comprehensive. It could be useful to study the possibility of introducing confidence-building measures in addition to the existing régime and taking further steps of openness in order to increase mutual trust and security. This is also a field where the global multilateral approach could contribute to the solution of problems.

The Gulf conflict has brought the problem of nuclear non-proliferation to the centre of attention again. The fourth NPT review conference in 1990 proved that the majority of the international community attached great significance to this issue. However, the fact that the existing régime lacks the adherence of certain States of crucial importance, and that the course of related events is accelerating, suggest that there is a need to establish a framework of contacts with these States. It might be advisable to take this into account when preparing for the next NPT review conference, which will be a milestone in the history of non-proliferation efforts.

I am convinced that the persistent threat of chemical weapons represents one of the major dangers with respect to human suffering. I suppose that many of us here were shocked by the pictures showing the frightening skills children acquired in using gas masks. Surely, none of us would like to create a future where such abilities are a prerequisite of human existence and where mankind has to learn to live under the perilous shadow of chemical weapons.

After more than 20 years of negotiations we need no additional arguments in favour of the early conclusion of the chemical weapons convention. We need action now, decisive and urgent action. This item of the agenda will have to be solved in the near future, despite the obvious fact that answers to major political and technical questions have yet to be found.

For any multilateral disarmament agreement to be viable the widest possible adherence is of crucial importance. In the case of the chemical weapons convention this means the involvement of all States that have declared the possession of chemical weapons and all States that have the technological capability of producing such weapons. In order to achieve the aim of universality the future convention must be attractive in the broadest sense and in no way discriminatory for potential States parties.

(Mr. Jeszenszky, Hungary)

The future multilateral legal instrument should be equitable in terms of rights and obligations of States parties. In the context of the convention, this entails an unconditional rejection of the use of chemical weapons connected to the obligation to destroy existing chemical weapon stockpiles totally.

I would like at this forum to reiterate once again our commitment to the total prohibition of chemical weapons. Hungary is among the States that have declared their intention to become original parties to the chemical weapons convention. My country declared in 1989 its intention to be in full conformity with the main provisions of the convention still being negotiated. In February 1990, as a measure of openness, we provided detailed data on the activities of our chemical industry as required by the draft provisions of the convention. I am pleased to announce that in document CD/1061 we are repeating this declaration and putting forward all the information required under the future convention. We are convinced that this step will contribute to the cause of negotiations, and we would welcome similar confidence-building measures on the part of other negotiating parties as well.

In my understanding current negotiating efforts are aimed at preparing possible solutions for a number of outstanding political issues related to the future chemical weapons convention. This set of solutions in turn could be formalized by the foreign ministers of States represented in the Conference on Disarmament, with the aim of giving a final push towards the successful conclusion of negotiations. I personally would be pleased to come back to the Conference for a ministerial meeting and share the common satisfaction of contributing to the efforts aimed at finalizing the draft convention.

In considering ways and means to preserve the vitality of the Conference on Disarmament, we could perhaps ponder what other issues are to be taken up after the successful termination of negotiations on chemical weapons. It might be deemed timely to initiate informal contacts amongst members of the Conference to probe different ideas. These informal contacts could and should, in due time, lead to wide agreement on relevant and politically feasible measures, however partial they might initially be.

The ideas presented in my statement are not an endeavour to pre-empt too precipitately such a process, but an effort to promote its timely launching. These ideas are not in the least intended to undermine the very important substantive work currently being conducted in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament. Rather, they are meant to highlight the need to preserve the authority of this body by enabling it to face new challenges and helping it to enter into a new phase of its existence. Nature has provided numerous examples proving that inability to adapt to the changing environment is not an advantage in the race for survival, called evolution.

The PRESIDENT: I thank His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary for his important statement and for the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I have no other speaker on my list for this plenary meeting. Does any other member wish to take the floor? It seems not.

(The President)

I now turn to another matter. The secretariat has circulated today, at my request, a timetable for meetings to be held by the Conference and its subsidiary bodies between today and the end of next week. This timetable is the result of the consultations I held yesterday with the chairmen of the ad hoc committees. As usual, it is merely indicative and subject to change, if the need arises. I have agreed with the chairmen of the subsidiary bodies that we should maintain close contact to ensure that the programme of meetings is fulfilled expeditiously. On this understanding, I propose that we now adopt the timetable.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: Before I adjourn this plenary meeting, I wish to recall that, as announced by my predecessor at the last plenary meeting and as indicated in the timetable, the Conference will hold, tomorrow, Thursday, immediately after the plenary meeting, an informal meeting devoted to the substance of agenda item 2, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament".

I note that, tomorrow, we shall have a visit from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, who is listed as first speaker. I hope therefore that we can start our plenary meeting punctually.

I have no other business for today. I now intend to adjourn this plenary meeting. The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held tomorrow, Thursday, 21 February, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.